

MARVEL PREVIEW PRESENTS

MERLIN

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A Saga of Epic
Beauty by
John BUSCEMA &
Doug MOENCH



NOREM

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STAN LEE presents:
MARVEL PREVIEW

featuring

MERLIN



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Let's talk a little about magic — —real magic.

About a year ago, then offset editor, Rick Marschall and I were discussing ways to further unleash the awesome artistic talents of John Buscema, now that our wondrous *Weirdworld* epic was reaching its conclusion. After bouncing some ideas back and forth, we finally agreed it might be best to ask Big John himself what project would most stimulate his creative juices.

John's response — —Camelot.

It seems old Blood-n-Guts Buscema, best known for his unequaled interpretation of *Conan the Barbarian*, is a longtime follower and collector of Hal Foster's highly detailed *Prince Valiant* newspaper strip. According to John, who's never been one to mute his artistic preferences in conversation, it was the only strip which, for him, truly lived and breathed. And he's always had a strong desire to try his highly capable hand at something in the medieval mold, which could challenge his penciling prowess as few things had before.

Naturally, we gave him our enthusiastic approval — especially after John had stipulated that he would have to plot the story as well as pencil it. Apparently, Mr. B. had had this little tale (whatever it might be) rolling around inside his head, taking shape for some time. Rick and I knew we'd latched onto something really nice. So we attempted to place as few restrictions as possible on John's Vision. We told him essentially, to do whatever he wanted; make it the length he chose, and we'd worry about where to run it later. When the work started arriving, we fell in love with it instantly. There was sheer poetry on those pages. The art was loose and lyrical, with an economy of line and breadth of composition that bordered on sheer genius. This was Buscema, distilled and refined, in absolute command of subject and style. I was awed over how many of Marvel's finest artists would gape at the penciling, each finding some subtlety in the drawing, some facial expression, panel progression or page design, which had, at first glance, slipped past my relatively untrained eye. The more I looked — the more I learned. This stunning issue of PREVIEW has not only been a pleasure to be associated with, it's also proven a valuable art lesson as well.

One of those most impressed was Tom Palmer, who, when offered the chance to ink "Quest of The King," enthusiastically compiled mounds of visual material on the mythical days of Camelot. The result is the classically textured linework and lavish tone quality so much an element of the final product. Tom's contribution is monumental, and it's a testament to his love for this labor that he worked for weeks while in extreme pain due to a pinched nerve in his leg — refusing even to enter the hospital, so he could complete the task.

One of the few snags we encountered along the way involved John Buscema himself. About midway through the project, John called me and said he'd been so involved with the graphics, that the basic story seemed to have wandered a bit and escaped him. He wanted to get it back on the track. I then called and explained our problem to writer Doug Moench. We'd intended giving Doug the *Merlin* story to script anyway, so, what the heck, we brought him in a few weeks early to help resolve some difficulties. Both John and Doug were extremely pleased with the plot conclusion they arrived at in conference over the phone.

Doug's script is a superb complement to the fine artwork on the following pages. And no less deserving of praise is John Costanza, who took the powerful prose and lettered it in a time-consuming, ornate style, utterly appropriate to the story. There was nary a miss among the many talented individuals who slaved over this charmed affair.

Also, I'd like to go on record thanking Jim Shooter, Rick Marschall and Lynn Graeme, all of whom editorially presided over this issue in one manner or another. These are the unsung knights in shining armor behind the scenes, who field problems with aplomb.

But an end to my meanderings. The spell now is cast. The cauldron bubbles with the ancient stuff of sorcery. And within this time-worn tome — Merlin the Magician awaits...

Ralph Macchio

QUEST of the KING!

*A spring day
in the time of
Camelot's
glory....*

*...and ARTHUR REY,
beloved king of England,
noble lord of the
Round Table, enters the
green glade for an
afternoon of sport.*

*Surrounded
by his loyal
retinue,
favorite falcon
on his glove,
Arthur cannot
conceive that
he rides into
the greatest
peril he has
ever known.*

*Sir John
and
Sir Thomas*

Story: Doug Moench &
John Buscema

Art: John Buscema, Tom Palmer
& John Tartaglione

Calligraphy: John Costanza



FLY,
GOLDENWING--
AND LEAD US
A MERRY
CHASE!



HE TAKES FLIGHT HEARTILY,
MY LIEGE.

AYE-- HE
HAS THE
BLOOD.

STILL,
HE'LL NOT
FLOAT
FAR.

But the chase halts even sooner than Arthur expected, all thoughts of falconry forgotten...



WHAT'S THIS? A
WOUNDED KNIGHT--
BUT HIS COLOR
AND ARMOR ARE
NOT FAMILIAR...



A STRANGER -- UNKNOWN
TO THE ROUND TABLE, AND
HIS WOUNDS ARE GRAVE--
THEY'LL SOON BLEED THE
LIFE FROM HIM IF THEY'RE
NOT STAUNCHED.



MORDRED! TO THE
CASTLE WITH THE
NEWS-- QUICKLY!

AT ONCE, MY
LIEGE.

THE REST
OF YOU--HELP
ME CARRY
HIM BACK.

Soon, a court page bolts up the tower stairs...

LORD MERLIN!
YOU MUST COME
AT ONCE! THE
KING WANTS
YOU TO--



A FIRE! MERLIN'S CHAMBER
HAS CAUGHT FIRE!



LORD MERLIN-- ARE YOU IN
THERE? ARE YOU HURT?!



*Strange
sounds
issue
from
within...*

*...and the great oaken door slowly creaks
open...*

WHO MISTAKES
THE PASSION
OF MY
EXPERIMENT
FOR A COMMON
FIRE?



AND WHO DARES TO
SUGGEST THAT
MERLIN COULD BE
INJURED BY MERE
FLAMES?

F-FORGIVE
ME, LORD
MERLIN, BUT
I THOUGHT
YOU...

THAT IS... I
M-MEAN... THE
KING WISHES
TO SEE YOU
IMMEDIATELY
AND I--



BEGONE, WHELP!

DISTURB ME
AGAIN AND I SHALL
SEE TO IT THAT
YOUR BACKSIDE
CATCHES FIRE!



Y-YES,
MILORD
MERLIN!



Nevertheless, the stern mage chooses to answer Arthur's summons in good time

He has pledged his life and his power to the service of a man who has himself chosen to serve justice in a position offering the temptation of corruption.

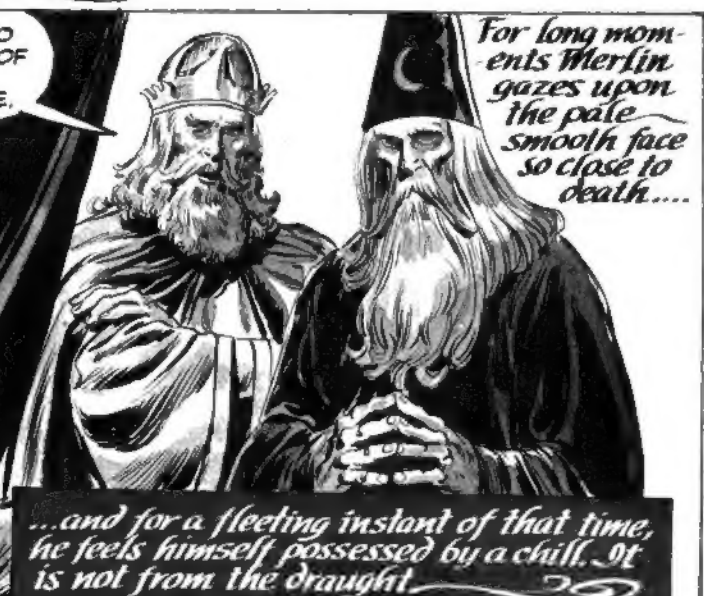


MERLIN! WE HAVE FOUND A STRANGER-- SERIOUSLY INJURED-- NOT A STONE'S THROW FROM THE CASTLE GATE.

OH? A STRANGER, MY KING?



YES. HE SEEMS FAR TOO YOUNG, TOO INNOCENT, TO BE A KNIGHT... AND PERHAPS SUCH IS THE CAUSE OF HIS PERIL. YET HE IS TOO FAIR TO DIE. GATHER ALL YOUR SKILLS IN HEALING AND ATTEND TO HIM AT ONCE.



For long moments Merlin gazes upon the pale smooth face so close to death....

...and for a fleeting instant of that time, he feels himself possessed by a chill. It is not from the draught.



CAN IT BE MERE COINCIDENCE OR...? EVIL OFTEN APPEARS IN PLEASING GUISE... YET I DARE NOT LET HIM DIE LEST HE PROVE TO BE INNOCENT.

VERY WELL, MY KING. I SHALL DO MY BEST.



Hours later...

WILL HE LIVE, MAGE?

YES, MY KING. HE WILL LIVE.

GOOD. 'TIS A STRANGE FEELING I HAVE ABOUT HIM...

FOLLY IT IS, NO DOUBT... BUT ALMOST THE FEELING A FATHER HAS FOR HIS SON.



And so, that evening at the Round Table, where no man can take a seat of favor over another...



THE REALM IS A MOST DISTANT ONE AND-- AGAIN I FEAR-- ONE I SHALL NEVER AGAIN SEE AS LONG AS I LIVE.



"FIVE YEARS AGO, WHEN MY BROTHER AND I WERE MERE STRIPLINGS, OUR FATHER BADE US TO GO OUT ON THE HUNT.



"IT WOULD BE OUR FIRST OUTING ALONE, WITHOUT HIS SUPERVISION.

"WE WERE BURSTING WITH THE PRIDE OF OUR NEW MANHOOD-- AND WITH THE THRILL OF THE HUNT.



"SOON ENOUGH, WE RODE DOWN A MAGNIFICENT STAG...

"...AND, AS WE JOSTLED EACH OTHER FOR THE LEAD, IT QUICKLY BECAME A CONTEST FOR THE KILL.



"A YEAR OLDER, MY BROTHER WAS THE BETTER HORSEMAN. HE SURGED AHEAD OF ME, HIS KILL SEEMINGLY CERTAIN.

"BUT, AS I SAID, IT WAS A MEADY EXPERIENCE AND I WAS DETERMINED NOT TO BE OUTDONE...

"IT WOULD BE A MUCH LONGER SHOT, BUT IF MY AIM WAS TRUE--"

"--I FELT I COULD YET PULL OUT THE VICTORY."



"BUT THEN, JUST AS I LET LOOSE, MY BROTHER VEERED TO AVOID SOME LOW BRANCHES--"



"--AND RODE DIRECTLY INTO THE FLIGHT OF MY ARROW."

"A TIME OF BRIGHT JOY WAS TRANSFORMED TO THE DARKEST, MOST HELLISH TRAGEDY EVER KNOWN."



"IT WAS TO BE THE DAY OF MY MANHOOD, BUT NEVER HAD I FELT SO SMALL... SO HELPLESS AND WEAK AND VULNERABLE."

"MY FATHER WAS SHATTERED BY DESPAIR."





"I WAS TOO YOUNG FOR SUCH A LIFE-- AND TOO YOUNG TO REALIZE IT.

"WHAT I LACKED IN SKILL AND EXPERIENCE WAS COMPENSATED BY FERVOR AND OBSESSION.

"AND SO IT WENT FOR YEARS.

"YEARS IN WHICH I WAS MOSTLY ALONE.



"RECENTLY, ARRIVING AT LAST ON THE FAR SHORE OF ENGLAND, I CAME UPON A SMALL VILLAGE.

"AS WAS MY CUSTOM, I DECIDED TO OFFER MY SERVICES IN ANY JUST CAUSE STILL OUT-STANDING.



"BUT I HAD HARDLY BARGAINED FOR THE DIRE TALE OF WOE WHICH SOON REACHED MY EARS. THE VILLAGERS SPOKE IN LAMENTATIONS OF A FEARSOME MONSTER WHICH HAD BEEN DEVOURING THEIR LOVED ONES FOR MORE THAN A MONTH. NOT BELIEVING THEM IN THE LEAST, I SET OUT TO FIND MORE HUMAN CULPRITS-- ROBBERY, I IMAGINED.



"BUT SOON I BEGAN TO SEE SIGNS OF TRUTH IN THEIR STORY OF A MONSTER.

"THE TRAIL WAS A GRISLY ONE OF SCORCHED EARTH AND BLEACHED BONES.

"AND EVERY STEP OF THE WAY I WAS FILLED WITH A MOUNTING DREAD.



THEN, WITHOUT WARNING AND TO MY SUPREME SHOCK, I CAME FACE TO FACE WITH THE THING.

"IT WAS HORRIBLE-- UNSPEAKABLE-- A HIDEOUS DRAGON OF HUGE DIMENSIONS, BREATHING FIRE AND SNORTING BRIMSTONE..."



ON INSTINCT, I THOUGHT TO IMPALE IT WITH MY LANCE.



"BUT MY HORSE REARED IN TERROR AND INSTEAD OF TAKING IT IN THE BELLY OR THROAT, MY LANCE DISAPPEARED INTO ITS Gaping JAWS. JUST AS WELL, I THOUGHT..."

...UNTIL I WITHDREW WHAT WAS LEFT OF MY LANCE AND FULLY REALIZED THE IMPORT OF THE SCORCHED TRAIL.



BEFORE I COULD DEVISE A NEW TACTIC, THE THING LUNGED AT ME WITH ALARMING SPEED.



"I WAS THROWN CLEAR--"



--AND MY MOUNT FLED FOR ITS LIFE.

"THEN THE GREAT DRAGON TURNED ON ME AND I REMEMBERED THE BONES. THERE WAS BUT ONE CHANCE, SLIGHT AS IT WAS..."





"BUT THE FLAMES WERE TOO MUCH FOR ME. MY ARMOR ABSORBED THE HEAT UNTIL I COULD FEEL MY FLESH BLISTERING."



"I SIMPLY COULDN'T GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO STRIKE-- AND WHEN THE HEAT GREW SO INTENSE THAT I COULD NO LONGER BREATHE..."





"FINALLY, IT GAVE,
DRIVING OTHER
LOOSE ROCKS
BEFORE IT. AT
THE BOTTOM
WAITED THE
DRAGON."



"IT WAS
CRUSHED,
AND
BURIED."



"I STAGGERED
AWAY, SORELY
INJURED, AND
WANDERED FOR
A FULL DAY.."



"... BEFORE COMING UPON
MY HORSE AGAIN.
NEARLY DELIRIOUS, I
WASN'T EVEN SURE I
COULD GAIN THE SADDLE,
BUT I EVENTUALLY
SUCCEEDED."





HEARKEN, FELLOW KNIGHTS!
ONE OF OUR OWN RETURNS
FROM HIS MISSION TO
THE SOUTH!

LANCELOT
OF THE LAKE?
HAS HE
RETURNED?



OF COURSE-- BUT
YOU NOW HAVE SOME
COMPETITION. MEET
OUR NEW APPRENTICE
AT THE ROUND TABLE.

OH? AND WHO IS
THIS STOUT LAD
WHO WOULD
SHARE THE TABLE
WITH ENGLAND'S
FINEST SWORDS?

BELIAR-- AND I
SHALL BE HON-
ORED TO BREA-
THE THE SAME AIR
WITH A KNIGHT
AS RENOWNED
AS SIR LANCELOT.



AYE, MY FRIENDS--
RETURNED IN TRIUMPH,
NO LESS!

AND I TRUST
YOU'VE BEEN
ADDING TO MY
LEGEND
WHILST I'VE
BEEN GONE.



HAH! WELL
SPOKEN. I LIKE
THE LAD.

NOW TELL ME,
MY FRIENDS--
HOW GOES
CAMELOT?



*Acceptance, it seems, will come
easy... perhaps too easy.*

*Beliar
smiles.*

And indeed, in the weeks that follow, as his wounds heal and his voice grows stronger, the ladies of the court flock to him...

...dressed in finer raiment, and with more care, than is customary for such casual pursuit.

Even Queen Guinevere smiles at the breath of good cheer brought by this youth and his merry song.



Somewhat, the sunlight seems more... golden...

The men, too, seem to embrace him as if by instinct. With the knights he trades tales of illustrious battles--and in him, they see a son, a companion, and a reflection of their own youth. Through him, they relive old beginnings.

With the squires and pages, he exchanges turns of fortune--and in him, they see a fellow rogue and rascal...



...enjoying intimacies with a superior. Intimacies they've never known with their true lords and masters.

Soon Beliar is fully accepted, if not as a proven knight, then at least as a face never to be challenged. He takes to roaming the castle freely...

...seemingly aimlessly.

And one day he comes upon a certain door, a great oaken door.

He does not pass it by.

And within

MERLIN'S SANCTUM.

THE PRIVATE CHAMBER OF THE GREATEST MAGE HISTORY HAS EVER KNOWN.





INDEED, I THINK
MY EARLY
SUSPICIONS
WERE ALL TOO
ACCURATE.

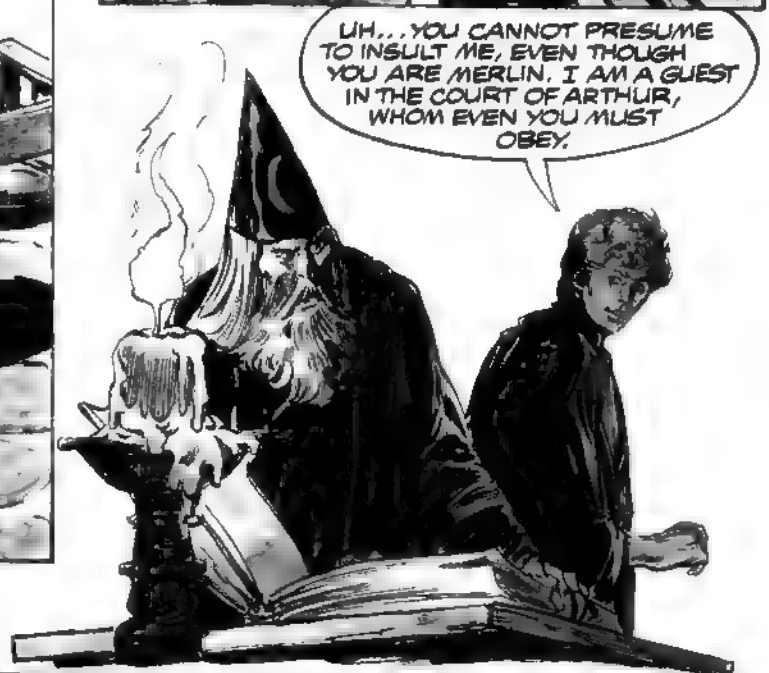
WHAT DO
YOU MEAN,
LORD
MERLIN?



YOU WILL KNOW
WHAT I MEAN, BELIAR,
AND I WILL KNOW
WHO YOU ARE.



WHAT?! BUT
YOU CANNOT--



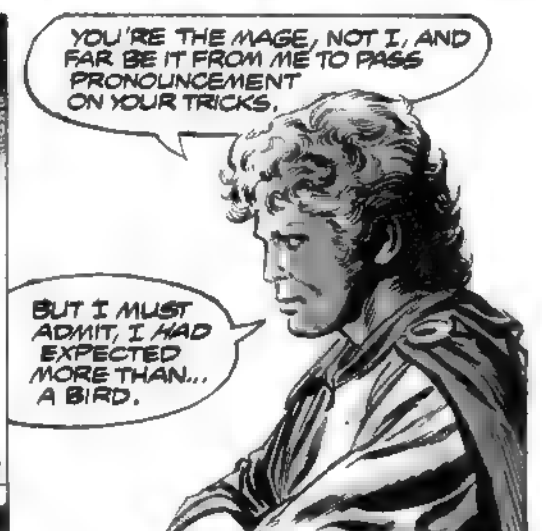
UH... YOU CANNOT PRESUME
TO INSULT ME, EVEN THOUGH
YOU ARE MERLIN. I AM A GUEST
IN THE COURT OF ARTHUR,
WHOM EVEN YOU MUST
OBEY.



HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?
I AM "A GUEST OF THE COURT
TO BE GRANTED THE BENEFIT
OF ALL GOOD GRACES."

YOU ARE INDEED A GUEST
OF THE COURT, BELIAR,
AND MORE'S THE PITY.

BUT AS FOR
DESERVING ITS GOOD
GRACES, I THINK
NOT, AND IN THE END...
WE SHALL SEE.





SO BE IT.

I FIND IT STRANGE THAT THE TASTES OF ONE SO YOUNG AND INNOCENT SHOULD PROVE SO BORED AND JADED. BUT IF IS SPECTACLE YOU CRAVE--

--FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIR GAWAIN'S PROUD SWORD...



...WHILE YOU CAN!



NOT BAD, A MOST SIMPLE DISAPPEARANCE, IT'S TRUE, BUT STILL... AN IMPROVEMENT, AND IF SUCH IS THE EXTENT OF YOUR POWERS--

--I SUPPOSE WE MUST ACCEPT IT AS SUFFICIENT ENTERTAINMENT.



'TIS A MISTAKE TO LET HIM GOAD ME--AND A GREATER MISTAKE TO REVEAL MUCH MORE OF MY POWER-- BUT THE DAMNABLE YOUTH REQUIRES A LESSON...

THE EXTENT OF MY POWERS...?



IF SUCH IS WHAT YOU DESIRE--

--THEN BEHOLD!



I GIVE YOU NOW BUT A GLIMPSE OF MY POWER'S CAPACITY--AND A GLIMPSE OF ARCAINE HORRORS UNKNOWN!

There are oaths and shouts, the sounds of overturning chairs, and swords raking scabbards...

Pandemonium surrounds the hellish swirl.



*Beliar slowly
cocks his
head, and
grins.*



THEN HE IS WORSE
THAN I FEARED.
MY VISION DID
NOTHING TO
DISTURB HIS
WICKED CALM.



BUT THE GAME HAS GONE
ON FAR ENOUGH. MORE OF
THE SAME WILL HARDLY
IMPRESS HIM--WHILE IT
GRAVELY DISTRESSES
THE OTHERS.

I HAVE LEARNED WHAT
I NEED TO KNOW--AND
'TIS BEST TO SAVE THE
REST FOR THE TIME OF
TRUE NEED, SURELY
SOON IN COMING.

IN THE NAME OF
MERLIN, I BANISH
THEE!



SEAT YOURSELVES,
GOOD KNIGHTS.

THE DANGER IS
EVER IN MY
CONTROL.

YE GODS,
MERLIN!

THIS TIME YOU
HAVE GONE
TOO FAR!!



WE SHALL LET OUR
GUEST BE THE JUDGE
OF THAT. WAS THE
MAGICK ENOUGH
FOR YOU, BELIAR?

I FELT NO
QUAKE OF THE
FOUNDATIONS,
BUT IT'LL DO...
FOR NOW.

YOU'RE
A MOST
COOL ONE,
LAD. BY
GOD, I
THOUGHT
THE WORLD
WAS
ENDING.

And so, the sides are drawn...
but Merlin cannot help
feeling that, in drawing them,
he has given Beliar a crucial
advantage.



The ensuing days pass un-
eventfully. Finally, on
the eve of the great tour-
nament, a feast is called
and laid to board...

EAT HEARTY, GOOD KNIGHTS.
ON THE MORN YOU SHALL
NEED ALL YOUR STRENGTH.



ONE WOULD THINK A
CRUSADE WERE IN THE
MOUNTING. A LAVISH
BANQUET OF THIS SCALE
FOR A MERE TOURNAMENT
-- FOR NOTHING MORE
THAN MOCK COMBAT?

YOU SHOULD BE THANKFUL, BELIAR. PERHAPS IT IS NOT SO IN YOUR HOMETLAND, BUT HERE IN ENGLAND THE JOUST IS TAKEN MOST SERIOUSLY-- AS PREPARATION FOR TRUE BATTLE. AS FOR THE SIZE OF THE BANQUET SPREAD, 'TIS MERELY AN INDICATION OF ARTHUR'S GENEROSITY.



AND FURTHER REASON WHY HE IS THE MOST BELOVED KING EVER TO WEAR THE CROWN OF ENGLAND.

OH? AND MIGHT IT NOT BE AN INDICATION OF SOMETHING ELSE? SAY, DECADENCE, PERHAPS?



AND CURRYING FAVOR AMONG GREEDY KNIGHTS?



SILENCE, DOG!

SIR PELLIAS, WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?! WHAT PROVOKED YOU TO STRIKE OUR GUEST?!



FORGIVE ME, MILORD, BUT I... I CANNOT EXPLAIN.

HONOR FORBIDS ME TO REPEAT OUR DISPUTE.



AYE, AND HONOR DEMANDS THAT THE DISPUTE BE SETTLED PROPERLY-- BY THE TRIAL OF ARMS!



VERY WELL, I LIKE IT NOT,
BUT I AM BOUND BY THE
CODE, CHOOSE YOUR
WEAPONS.



As the offended party, Beliar
chooses longsword and
buckler. A hush fills the
hall as Arthur raises
his arm...



NOW! LET THE TRIAL
BEGIN!



*Sir Pellias
lunges forward
with the first
...Strike...*

...and the second,
and the third.



*Beliar's offense
is nonexistent,
his defense ready
to crumble...*

THESE KNIGHTS OF
ARTHUR'S COURT ARE
FAR BETTER THAN I
COULD HAVE
IMAGINED--!



AND SO... I MUST
EXERCISE AN
ADVANTAGE
FROM WITHIN...







HE... HE'S DEAD, PELLIAS IS DEAD!

NO! NOT AGAIN! WHAT HAVE I DONE?! I EXPECTED HIM TO DEFEND HIMSELF! I MEANT TO MERELY STRIKE HIM DOWN, NOT SLAY HIM!!



CALM YOURSELF, BELIAR, IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT.

I... I CAN ONLY GUESS THAT HE THOUGHT BETTER OF OUR DISPUTE... AND CONSCIENCE DICTATED HIS DECISION.

STILL, HE SHOULD HAVE DEFENDED HIMSELF. HIS HARSH WORDS AGAINST YOU, MILADY, WERE NOT WORTH HIS DEATH.



BE NOT FOOLED, MY KING. HE MEANT TO SLAY PELLIAS. MARK MY WORD: HE IS EVIL.

NONSENSE, MERLIN. PELLIAS CHOSE NOT TO DEFEND HIMSELF. WE CANNOT HOLD BELIAR RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT CHOICE.

NOR CAN WE BRAND HIM A VILLAIN FOR THE ACCIDENT.



IT MUST BE A GREAT SHOCK, GOOD BELIAR... AFTER YOUR BROTHER'S DEATH--AND NOW THIS.

BUT YOU MUST NOT HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE, AND YOU MUST NOT LET IT SPOIL YOUR DAY TOMORROW, THE TOURNAMENT IS YOUR CHANCE TO JOIN OUR COURT PERMANENTLY.

PERHAPS YOU ARE RIGHT, KIND LADY GUINEVERE. YOUR WORDS ARE A BALM OF SOLACE... AND I THANK YOU, AND YOUR HUSBAND ARTHUR, FOR ALL YOU'VE DONE IN MY BEHALF.



The kiss is but a soft, quick gesture of gratitude... yet Guinevere is shaken by it...

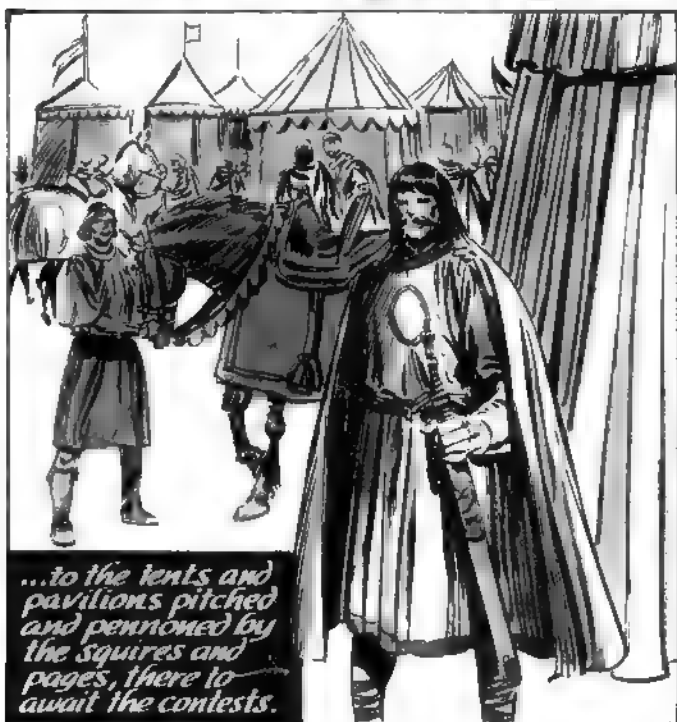


...as a chill courses up her spine.

The tournament: Heralded by a flourish of trumpets, the knights of the Round-Table march from the shadows of Camelot's walls out into the full sun, each encased in the harsh bright regalia of combat.



Gentle maidens wave to the men of iron as they move to the field of honor in magnificent, awesome procession...



...to the tents and pavilions pitched and pennoned by the squires and pages, there to await the contests.

But first there is the formal proclamation to be made, a brief oratory (as is Arthur's wont) on courage and chivalry. Then...



LET THE JOUSTING COMMENCE!

*And so the morning passes,
with the thunder of
overburdened steeds...*



*...the clash
of lance
on shield...*



*...and the hearty voices
of victors and vanquished.*



IS THERE A
CHURCH NEARBY,
SIR GAWAIN?

NO BELLS, SIR KAY--
'TIS JUST MY STOUT
LANCE STILL RINGING
IN YOUR EARS.

SOMEDAY I MUST TRADE
LANCES WITH YOU. MINE NEVER
SEEMS QUITE SO STOUT.

By noon, Lancelot is the only knight undefeated.



AND WHO IS MY NEXT OPPONENT, SQUIRE?

I DON'T THINK THERE IS ANYONE LEFT TO--

THERE IS ME, LANCELOT...

...THOUGH I INSIST THAT MY NAME REMAIN SECRET.



VERY WELL, SIR UNKNOWN.

RAISE YOUR LANCE AND--



But the mysterious knight has already begun his charge...

Lancelot is assailed unprepared--



--and unseated without dignity or grace.





Quick as lightning, the unknown Knight springs from his steed. The heavy armor seems to slow him not at all...

And while Lancelot still lies stunned--



WHAT--?! YOU GIVE ME NO TIME TO DEFEND MYSELF! WHO THE DEVIL ARE YOU?



ENOUGH!

HALT, I SAY!!

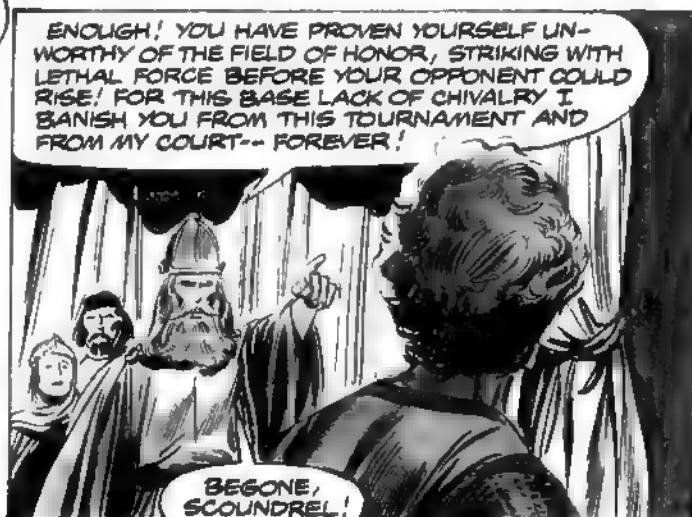


REMOVE YOUR HELM, UNKNOWN KNIGHT-- AT ONCE!



BELIAR! BUT... BUT HOW COULD YOU-- A MERE APPRENTICE...

AN "APPRENTICE" WHO HAS TAUGHT THE GREAT SIR LANCELOT A LESSON IN HUMILITY THIS DAY.



ENOUGH! YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF UNWORTHY OF THE FIELD OF HONOR, STRIKING WITH LETHAL FORCE BEFORE YOUR OPPONENT COULD RISE! FOR THIS BASE LACK OF CHIVALRY I BANISH YOU FROM THIS TOURNAMENT AND FROM MY COURT-- FOREVER!

BEGONE, SCOUNDREL!



ARTHUR! YOU MUST RECONSIDER! HE'S SO YOUNG--AND A STRANGER! PERHAPS THE RULES OF HONOR ARE DIFFERENT IN HIS LAND! HE WAS MERELY TRYING TO PROVE HIMSELF TO--

NO, GUINEVERE, I LIKE HIM NOT, MERLIN HAS HINTED ABOUT HIS DANGER TO US AND I NOW AGREE.

HE HAS BEEN BANISHED-- AND HE SHALL REMAIN SO.



SO BE IT, KING ARTHUR, I SHALL RETURN TO MY CHAMBER, AND DEPART YOUR CASTLE ON THE MORROW.



But that very night--

MILADY! SHE IS GONE! LADY GUINEVERE IS GONE!!

MERLIN! HELP ME! OH PLEASE-- HELP ME!

And soon...



WHAT?! THE QUEEN IS MISSING?!

YES, MY KING--HER CHAMBERMAID SO INFORMED ME JUST NOW.

I KNEW YOU WOULD WANT TO BE AWAKENED.



AND YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME NOW, MY KING! I HAVE NO PROOF, BUT I KNOW SHE WAS ABDUCTED BY BELIAR.

THEN BY GOD AND ALL THAT'S HOLY, HE SHALL PAY!

AYE, AND SO SHALL GUINEVERE--FOR TAKING PITY ON THE FOUL CUR!

NAY, MY KING--PUNISH NOT GUINEVERE. SHE IS UNDER HIS SPELL. AND NOW DO YOU SEE I WAS RIGHT--THAT BELIAR IS THE GREATEST EVIL WE HAVE EVER FACED?



And so the quest begins at a bleak, grim dawn--the second quest of a king for his queen...

ONE MATTER STILL TROUBLES ME, MERLIN. WE WILL RIDE SOUTH, BUT HOW WILL WE FIND THEM?



THE RAIN HAS WASHED AWAY THEIR TRACKS.

NAY, HE IS BUT A MAN, MERLIN, AND GUINEVERE MAY INDEED BE UNDER A SPELL--BUT IT IS A SPELL OF MISGUIDED PITY, PERHAPS EVEN MOMENTARY LOVE--THOUGH I PREFER TO BELIEVE SHE HAS BEEN SIMPLY AND BASELY ABDUCTED.

BY A COMMON, MORTAL MAN. NOTHING MORE.

BUT--



SILENCE, MERLIN! WE RIDE OUT AT ONCE!

IF I AM RIGHT, MY KING, THAT PROBLEM WILL BE THE LEAST OF OUR WORRIES. THE WAY SHALL BE ALL TOO CLEAR...

...AND THE RAIN IS BUT THE FIRST SIGN.



YOU SPEAK
AS IF WE
EMBARK
UPON A
QUEST OF
DOOM.

I BELIEVE THE POTEN-
TIAL FOR DOOM
EXISTS. EVEN NOW, THE
VERY SKIES CONSPIRE
AGAINST US. AT THE
VERY LEAST, WE FOLLOW
BAIT INTO A TRAP...
AND YET, THERE IS
NO OTHER CHOICE.



Later...

THOUGH YOUR FEARS
ARE FOOLISH, MERLIN, I
MUST ADMIT-- YON
PILLARS SEEM TO FORM
A MOST FORBIDDING
PORTAL...

YES, MY
KING.

STAY BEHIND
MY SHIELD AND
ARMOR, MAGE!

MAKE FOR
THE SAFETY
OF A PILLAR!



*Suddenly, the air
begins to throb and
hum...*

A WIND
DEMON!



WE SHALL WAIT HERE--
UNTIL NATURE'S FURY
HAS RUN ITS COURSE.

YOU REMAIN
CONVINCED THESE
OBSTACLES ARE
NATURAL?

I DO.

THAN
YOU ARE
MOST
STUBBORN,
MY KING.





But halfway across...





TRUE, BUT THEIR LACK OF INTELLECT OFTEN FREES THEIR MINDS TO RECOGNIZE SHEER EVIL ON INSTINCT, WHEREAS OUR CLUTTERED MINDS SOMETIMES FALL TO--

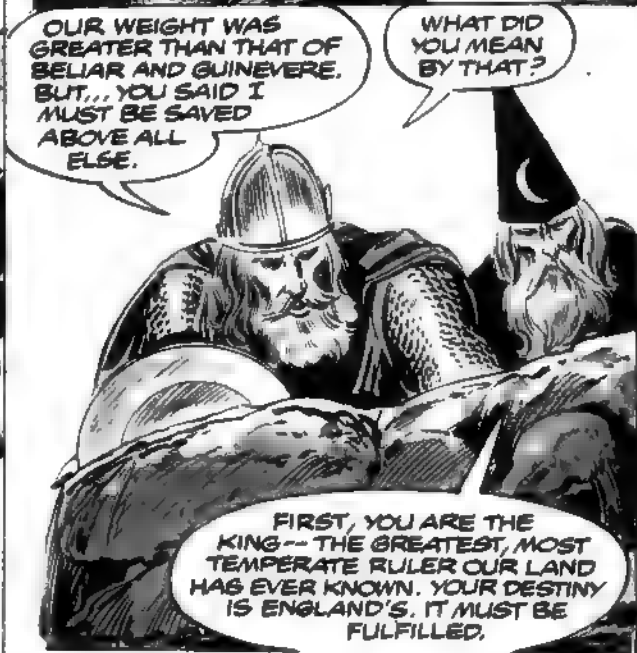
--THE CAUSEWAY!
IT BEGINS TO
CRUMBLE!!



FORWARD, MY KING!
YOUR LIFE ABOVE
ALL ELSE MUST BE
SPARED!



And as the
twosome
rush to
safety...



OUR WEIGHT WAS
GREATER THAN THAT OF
BELIAR AND GUINEVERE.
BUT... YOU SAID I
MUST BE SAVED
ABOVE ALL
ELSE.

WHAT DID YOU
MEAN
BY THAT?

FIRST, YOU ARE THE
KING-- THE GREATEST, MOST
TEMPERATE RULER OUR LAND
HAS EVER KNOWN. YOUR DESTINY
IS ENGLAND'S. IT MUST BE
FULFILLED.

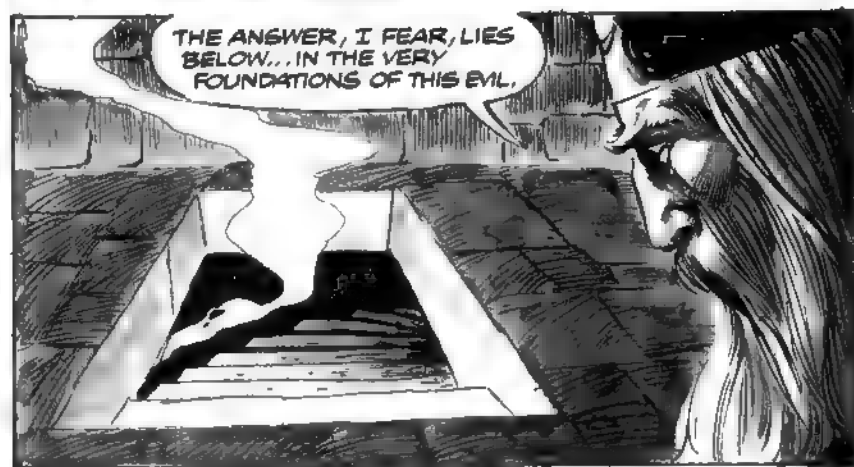
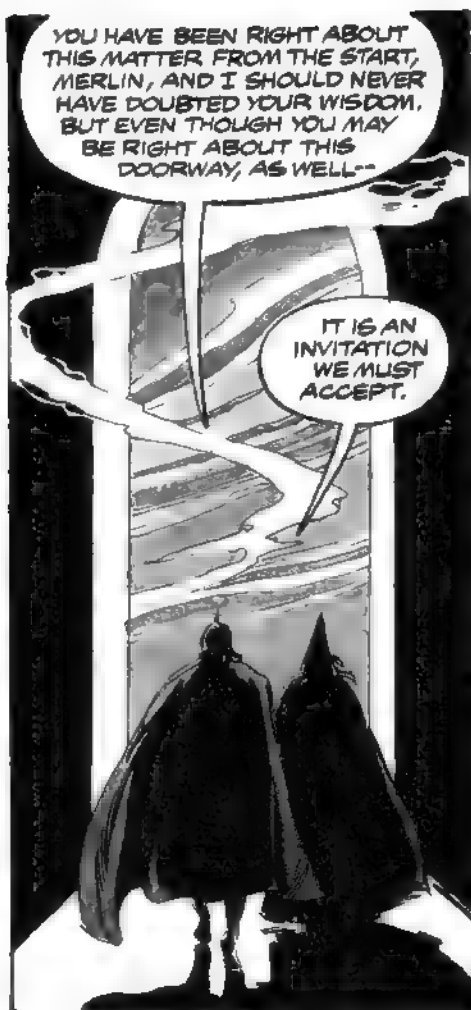
SECOND,
WHATEVER EVIL
AGENCY PITS
THESE PERILS
AGAINST US
OBVIOUSLY
SEEKS YOUR
DEATH. IT IS
AFRAID OF
YOU... AND
SO, YOU
MAY BE THE
ONLY ONE
WHO CAN
DESTROY IT.













NO, BUT EVERY CONSTRUCT OF DECEIT AND EVIL THE WORLD HAS EVER ENDURED WAS BUILT PRECISELY UPON A FOUNDATION SUCH AS THIS...

BUT... THIS PLACE RESEMBLES... HELL ITSELF.

PRECISELY, MY KING, PRECISELY.



WHAT--?!

MERLIN--! ACROSS YON SMOKING CHASM--!



'TIS THE QUEEN-- MY LADY GUINEVERE-- SHACKLED LIKE A COMMON THIEF!



THE LEAP TO YON LEDGE MAY BE TOO FAR FOR ANY MAN, BUT I MUST TRY TO--

HOLD, MY KING! REMEMBER, IT IS BAIT FOR A TRAP! YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT MIGHT--

And, before Arthur can make his desperate leap, a wall of flame geysers up from the bottomless chasm...

GUINEVERE-- SHE IS CUT FROM MY VIEW!

HOW CAN WE BREACH THE FIRES TO RESCUE HER?!

YOU CANNOT.

Merlin is first to spin toward the hollow, mocking voice...

THE TRAP IS SEALED. YOU ARE PRISONERS IN MY DOMAIN.

WHO--?!

I FEAR, MY KING, IT IS... BELIAR'S FATHER.

"And" Merlin thinks with rueful pain, "the Baron of the Netherlands indeed!"



HEAR ME, KING ARTHUR AND WIZARD MERLIN, AND KNOW THAT YOU LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF YOUR DESTROYER. YOU HAVE COME A LONG WAY TO DIE...



...AT THE HANDS OF MY SON!

BELIAR! STRIDING UPON THIN AIR-- THROUGH THE FLAMES-- UNSCATHED!

YES, AND READY TO MEET YOU IN FINAL COMBAT, HE WAS OVER- ZEALOUS AT YOUR TOURNAMENT, SPOILING MY PLAN TO DESTROY YOU FROM WITHIN--IN YOUR OWN COURT, BEFORE THE EYES OF YOUR VALIANT KNIGHTS...



NEVERTHELESS, I AM WILLING TO GIVE HIM A SECOND CHANCE, NOW, TO... AH, REDEEM HIMSELF.



CAN YOU NOT GUESS, KING ARTHUR?

The magician hesitates, then speaks grimly, simply...



BECAUSE YOU ARE A FORCE OF GOOD, MY KING.



MORE THAN A MERE
FORCE OF GOOD, YOU
ARE THE MOST NOBLE
AND SELFLESS KING
WHO HAS EVER LIVED!

SIMPLY BY BEING, YOU
ARE A SUPREME LEADER
OF OTHER MEN!

YOU ARE THE LIVING INSPIRATION
FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS---
FOR GALLANTRY, NOBILITY, CHIVALRY,
JUSTICE!

AND, QUITE INNOCENTLY,
YOU WILL SPREAD THIS
FORCE OF GOOD THROUGH-
OUT THE ENTIRE WORLD
IF YOU ARE NOT CHECKED
NOW!

THUS, YOU ARE MY
BORN ENEMY, KING
ARTHUR, MY GREATEST
ENEMY...

...FOR I AM THE
PRINCE
OF EVIL!!

NOW: LET THE
COMBAT BEGIN---
AND LET YOUR
SOUL BURN
FOREVER!

Belial glides forward, his face a wicked leer...

SO, KING ARTHUR, WE MEET IN EARNEST... A MEETING I HAVE LONG ANTICIPATED.

DO YOU RECALL HOW YOU RECENTLY BANISHED ME IN DISGRACE--?

WELL, TAKE YOUR GUARD, PITIFUL KING--

--FOR THERE IS NO WAY IN HEAVEN OR HELL THAT YOU CAN BANISH MY SPECTER HERE!

BUT FEAR NOT, ARTHUR, ALTHOUGH I AM PLEDGED TO MAKE YOUR DEATH AS PAINFUL AS POSSIBLE, I SHALL ALSO MAKE IT SWIFT.

I AM EAGER, YOU SEE, TO RETURN TO MY SWEET GUINEVERE.

And it transforms Arthur into a lion of proud, righteous fury!

The taunt stings more than the clash of steel coursing from arm to heart.



TAKE HIM, BELIAR! SLAY HIM! FREE HIS BLOOD AND BARE HIS DAMNED SOUL!

HE IS TOO STRONG, FATHER!

HIS MIGHT IS AWESOME!



THEN YOU SHALL FIGHT WITH MY STRENGTH ADDED TO YOUR OWN!

The evil one gestures...



--and Beliar instantly becomes a raging berserker, a demon of combat.

Arthur falls back, helpless against the crushing onslaught.



Two strokes more--three at the most--and he will be done.



The changing tide has hardly escaped Merlin's notice...

ARTHUR FIGHTS TWO DEMONS AT ONCE! HE CANNOT HOPE TO PREVAIL--UNLESS I ADD MY POWER TO HIS ARM...

And so, Merlin too makes a gesture...



...and the tide of battle shifts yet again.

This time the two opponents trade blows with seemingly equal advantage...



But Merlin knows the sides have now been twice drawn. TWO battles are contested in this raging inferno--the physical one between Arthur and Beliar.

...and a mystical battle of silent, invisible proportions between the Prince of Evil--



The victors of both contests will be decided by the outcome of the latter, by the sheer strength of arcane wills.



--and himself.

And against his bloody enemy, Merlin knows he cannot long compete.



I COMMAND YOU, BELIAR--SLAY HIM!

Another gesture



--and Beliar seems to grow, his sword bursting into a blade of flame.

YOUR SOUL IS MINE--YOUR SOUL, AND GUINEVERE'S!

NO--!!



The contest of wills has been won...

NO... F-FORGIVE ME, MY KING...

Merlin falls, agony seizing his mind...



...and then, too, the defenseless king falls to his own defeat...

...a mere physical echo of the battle already done.



In torment, he comes to rest at the precipice of the flaming chasm...

GAZE DOWNWARD, ARTHUR, INTO THE PIT OF HELL-- INTO THE ETERNAL TORMENT YOU SHALL SOON ENDURE!

ONE FINAL SLASH AND YOUR HEAD WILL FALL FOREV--



HOLD, BELIAR! FETCH HIS QUEEN AND BRING HER HERE. LET HIM GROVEL A FEW MOMENTS MORE... THAT I MAY ENJOY WATCHING THEM BOTH DIE TOGETHER.



In silent obedience, Beliar steps from the ledge into the wall of fire...

...while Merlin gathers his scattered wits...

SHOULD HAVE KNOWN... NORMAL STRENGTH AND COURAGE CAN NEVER DEFEAT THE GUILF OF SUPREME EVIL... BUT CAN THIS FINAL ACT OF CRUELTY ON HIS PART BE TURNED AGAINST HIM...?



...and while Arthur makes one last valiant bid for victory...



IF I CAN BUT... REACH MY SWORD... WE MAY YET--



FOOL!!

YOU HAVE BEEN BEATEN-- AND NOW YOU MUST DIE! IT IS INEVITABLE! ACCEPT IT!!

NO...NO, I CANNOT ACCEPT IT...



NOT IF IT MEANS GUINEVERE'S LIFE... HER SOUL...!

TAKE MY SOUL, DAMN YOU-- BUT FREE HERS! SHE CAN DO YOU NO HARM ALONE! TAKE ME-- BUT NOT HER!!













AYE, AND THE SWEET
SCENTS OF SUMMER
DRIFT TO US ON A
COOL BREEZE...

AND BIRDS, ARTHUR!
I HEAR THE SONG
OF BIRDS!

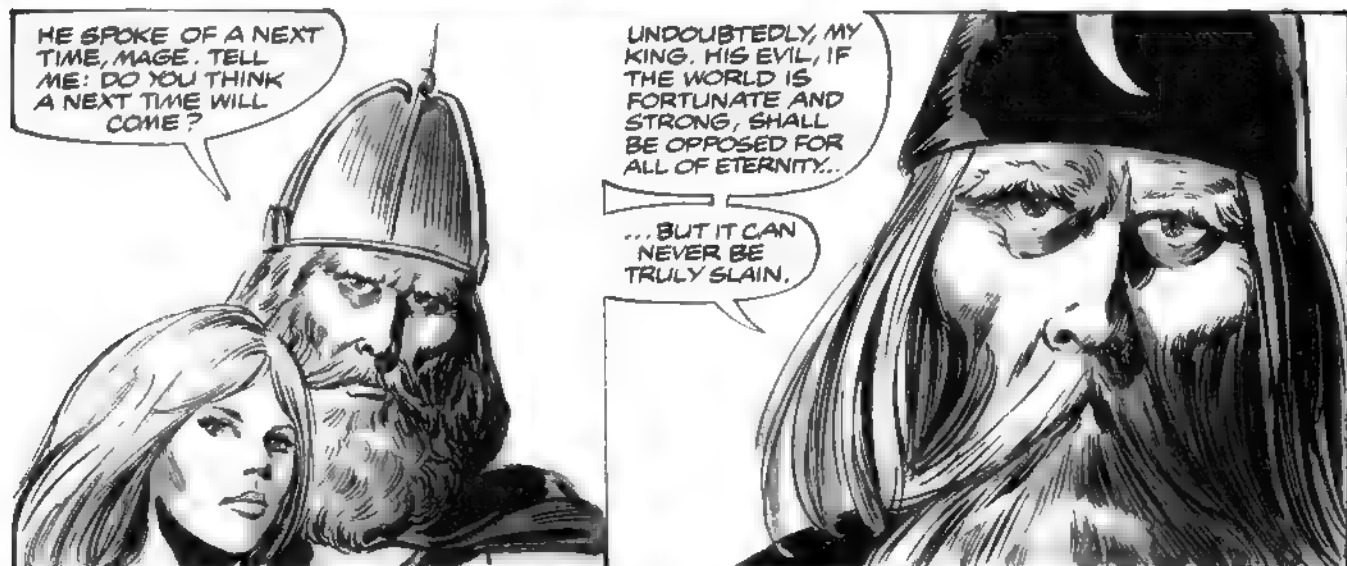
MORE THAN REWARD
ENOUGH, IT SEEMS,
FOR BOTH YOUR
SUFFERING AND YOUR
VICTORY.



*The tunnel opens at the
base of the mountain on
which the castle is built.
They pause for a last
look at the mysterious
keep of evil...*

IT WILL BE
A LONG
JOURNEY
BACK TO
CAMELOT..

YES, MY KING, WE
ARE FAR, FAR FROM
HOME... AND YET, THE
WAY WILL BE CLEAR
AND EASY.



HE SPOKE OF A NEXT
TIME, MAGE. TELL
ME: DO YOU THINK
A NEXT TIME WILL
COME?

UNDOUBTEDLY, MY
KING. HIS EVIL, IF
THE WORLD IS
FORTUNATE AND
STRONG, SHALL
BE OPPOSED FOR
ALL OF ETERNITY...

... BUT IT CAN
NEVER BE
TRULY SLAIN.

End.

TWO VIEWS OF

VIEW ONE: The AGES OF ARTHUR

by Bill Mantlo

*Known history relates few facts,
but many probabilities.*

—R.L. Haney

By 350 A.D. the dissolution of the vast Roman Empire was almost complete. There was no "decline and fall," as Gibbon would have us believe, merely a process of absorption, as Rome's colonies, sensing the inability of the Imperial authority to protect or enrich them further, became national entities and began to colonize on their own.

The Roman Empire itself had split into two separate Imperial entities, Christian Empires of the East and the West, as often at war with each other as with their common foes, the barbarian hordes sweeping down out of the north through Gaul to feast upon the fertile farmlands of the south.

In Roman Britain, the Vicars of the Church watched nervously as the Roman Legions broke camp and sailed away across the Channel, leaving Britain, a Roman colony, to defend itself against a host of invaders; the Germanic tribes of Goths, Visigoths, Saxons, Normans, and the barbaric Irish and Scots. The Holy Roman Church strove to preserve a semblance of the Empire in its absence. Trade routes and military roads were retained. Hadrian's Wall, a barrier thrown up across Northern Britain to repel the Irish, was repaired and patrolled. The British nobility, speaking Latin even if they could not read or write it, lived in lavish Romanized villas and purchased goods with Roman coinage. British Legions, patterned after the Imperial Legions of Rome, repelled the invader and policed the walled hill-cities which, in the absence of a strong fighting force, presented the best defense against the foe.

It was into this Roman/British world that Arthur was born, around A.D. 475 if archaeological reconstruction has any validity. Rome had withdrawn its protection — indeed, it had all to do to protect itself — and a succession of Romanized British noblemen had taken Rome's banner as their own to defend a lifestyle that was constantly threatened by barbarian incursions from all sides. From 425 to 459 A.D. Vortigern repelled the Scotch Irish and the Picts. His successor, Cunedda, whom legend transformed into "Old King Cole," raised the Roman British standard against the Saxons and Angles, invading from the south. By the time Arthur assumed the mantle of Commander General of the British Isle, the Angles — or *English* — had established a permanent occupation in southeastern Britain and had driven the Britons themselves westward and northward.

Outside of the Church and the nobility, the memory of Rome and the speaking of Latin had given way to a British national identity and a language composed of Latin and Germanic roots. It was to preserve the Roman identity, unity, and concept of "*civitas*" — the state — that Arthur fought against the English. Indeed, the name "*Arthur*" itself is from the Roman-Latin *Arturus*, and is hardly the type of British nomenclature a Fourth Century Briton would possess were he not of the Romanized nobility.

Historically, little is known of Arthur. That he was a great

General who preserved the realm against the Angles is related by the Roman British historian Gildas whose work survives in fragments, and through fragments of ancient Welsh poems. In a document by another Roman British historian, Nennius, in what appears to be a prose summary in Latin of a lost Welsh poem, Arthur is credited with victory in twelve major battles against the English. It is stated that Arthur's use of cavalry against the English infantry produced the wins. A much later Welsh poem, the "*Elergy for Geraint*," probably based on oral tradition extending back to the actual Battle of Badon, describes one of Arthur's battles:

*In Llongbroth I saw Arthur's
Heroes who cut with steel.
The Emperor, ruler of our labour.*

*In Llongbroth Geraint was slain.
Heroes of the land of Dyfneint,
Before they were slain, they slew.*

*Under the thigh of Geraint, swift chargers,
Long their legs, wheat their fodder,
Red, swooping like milk-white eagles...*

*When Geraint was born, heaven's gate stood open;
Christ granted all our prayers;
Lovely to behold, the glory of Britain.*

"Llonborth" means, in Welsh, the "ship port". Arthur then, fighting alongside the Welsh hero Geraint, fought and repelled the invader, driving them back to sea. Another fragment records that Arthur led a "mighty army" (perhaps a thousand men on horse) to victory, himself slaying 960 of the foe.

Nothing else is known historically. According to Gildas, Arthur died circa 520 A.D. at a place named *Camlann*. Suggesting *Camelot*, the name was so commonly used throughout the British Isles that we still have no idea where the spot actually was.

Arthur's kingdom of the early Sixth Century would have borne little or no relation to future interpretations of Camelot. It was a wild, barbaric frontier. With Rome gone, Roman traditions died or became transformed. Repeated invasions eradicated the Roman nobility. Constant wars left little time for literacy and Arthur and his contemporaries would have been tutored on the field of battle. Feudalism was undoubtedly the main economic structure, with the peasants feeding the armies who were perhaps as much of a bane to their existence as the troops of the invaders. Starvation, disease and ignorance were the realities; chivalry and a "Golden Age of Enlightenment" the myths of a much later time. Arthur fought to maintain the last vestiges of the Roman occupation of Britain. After his death the Saxon and English invaders intermixed with the British and Welsh and the nation of Britain was born from the Roman ashes. Arthur, then, only stemmed the tide. He could not turn it back.

KING ARTHUR



MARIE SEVERIN

ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

Why then the myths?

The nearer his own time that we can get through the extremely rare surviving fragments, Arthur is painted as a barbarian warlord, a great general who relies on his ruthlessness and his cunning more than his moral precepts to repel an equally barbaric invader. In ancient Welsh poems, Arthur is shown as a dark, brooding, unscrupulous lord standing against the Welsh church. In what may have been the very first linking of Arthur and Merlin, Arthur encounters the Welsh Saint Cadoc. Arthur enters the Saint's church and attempts to use the altar as a table (or, in a variation, attempts to steal the Saint's robe by force) when Saint Cadoc appears and bids the Earth to open and swallow this evil King. When Arthur begs the Saint's forgiveness, Cadoc lets him go, ordering him to repent and grant estates to the Church. In yet another legend involving Arthur and Cadoc, written about 20 years after Arthur's death, St. Cadoc's father is presented as having abducted the daughter of a neighboring king and is escaping across the frontier with the girl across the back of his horse when he is espied by Arthur and two of his knights, Cai and Bedwyr:

But lo, three noble heroes... were sitting playing dice on top of a hill when they saw the king and the girl. Arthur's heart was fired with lust... Full of evil thoughts he said to his knights, "I am on fire with desire for the girl that warrior is carrying on his horse." But they replied: "You must not do anything so criminal; we are supposed to help the needy and distressed. Let us go and help these people who are hard-pressed." Arthur answered: "All right; if you would rather help him than grab the girl for me, go and ask whose land they are fighting on."

Arthur aided St. Cadoc's father to steal the girl. It seems probable that, the Arthurian legend already outgrowing the true Arthurian character by 540 A.D., the author felt constrained to add the criticism of the two knights reminding Arthur that chivalry ought to supercede carnality.

Repeated mystical run-ins with St. Cadoc may have given rise to the myth of Merlin in conjunction with Arthur, and an early poem by Robert de Borron called *Merlin* simply lifts the

St. Cadoc legend and replaces it with the character of the alchemical mage who later became Arthur's tutor and mentor through the works of Alfred Lord Tennyson and T.H. White.

By the Twelfth Century, all knowledge of an historical Arthur was forgotten. Legends, oral and written, became embroidered as each succeeding generation sought a hero on which to impose their own moral values and codes. The "invaders" of Arthurian times having become assimilated into the population of Britain, the myths pitted Arthur against the "forces of darkness," the forces "outside the realm." As Arthur grew purer, more filled with light, the dark figure of Mordred was conjured forth to stand against him. Most folklore pits the dark against the light, the ying against the yang, and if the two can be related — as by making Mordred, Arthur's half-brother — then the tragedy of the contrast imbues the myth with romantic despair.

With all dictions, writers rarely have to consider the historical progression unless absolutely required. Sir Thomas Malory, who in 1485 borrowed from earlier sources to compose his great *Le Morte D'Arthur*, wove into the fabric of his story the names of knights and ladies from times hundreds of years apart. Guinevere, Gawain, Ewain, Lancelot and all the other Knights of the Round Table, having had historical or mythical existences of their own, were drawn into and subordinated by the Arthurian legend as it continued to grow to satisfy the hunger of its audience for ever new, ever longer tales.

But it was not until Sir Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King*, published in 1859, that Arthur himself became an active figure in the tales. Prior to Tennyson, the Knights played the major roles. In *Idylls of the King* Arthur codified chivalry, dispatched the Knights upon their quests, guided their moral behavior and spiritual growth, and suffered himself the hatred of Mordred and the inconstancy and betrayal of his beloved Guinevere and Lancelot. Tennyson shaped the myth for the 19th and 20th Centuries, and the myth of a Golden Age of Camelot has survived the humorous barbs of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) as well as various other popular adaptations to print, stage and screen.

The character of Merlin, perhaps based upon the historical St. Cadoc, only became an established part of the myth with the publication of T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* in 1939. Again Germanic outsiders threatened the Kingdoms of the West. White and other fantasy writers drew upon the Arthurian legends to create a shining symbol of Good to pit against the dark forces of Evil. The similarities between the Camelot legends and Tolkien's Middle Earth sagas are not coincidence. Both arose in the upheaval preceding World War II when it seemed to many that civilization might be posed upon the brink of destruction. A hero was necessary to save us, and Arthur was as heroic as any.

In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy recalled the Camelot legends once again as the Cuban Missile Crisis poised the United States and the Soviet Union on the edge of nuclear war. Equating his own youthful administration with Camelot, Kennedy's death seemed to enshroud him in a tragic myth similar to that woven about Arthur. The stage version of *Camelot*, Kennedy's favorite play, seemed to make the Arthurian legends more timely. Again a leader had fallen, and again the barbaric forces of the East threatened civilization. It is no accident that the Disney Studios chose this period to animate T.H. White's *Once and Future King*. Again, different societies make what they will of the Arthurian legends.

VIEW TWO:

LOOKING FOR THE REAL ARTHUR

by Steven Grant

Few legends have gripped the collective imagination of Western civilization as strongly as that of King Arthur, for we find associated with his legend adventure, intrigue, romance, magic, tragedy, and one of the most amazing conglomerations of characters in the annals of literature. Almost every human being in Western Europe and North America knows something of the exploits of the Knights of the Round Table; most of them probably assume that the Arthurian romances have some basis in history.

The question of an historical Arthur is a tricky one, for, despite the dogmatic conclusions of a number of over-zealous scholars, there is little if any evidence to place Arthur firmly in an historical context. Most scholars place his existence circa 500 AD, and claim that he was a great fighter against the Anglo-Saxon invaders. If this is true, he must not have been very successful. The Anglo-Saxon invasions that began around 440 AD made steady and unabated inroads into Britain, until, in 880 AD, they had virtually total control of the island.

Certainly, the Welsh cleric Gildas (516?-570) records a great battle at Mt. Badon (in Dorset) in his fragmentary *De Exidio et Conquestu Britannia*, but Arthur's name is not connected with the battle until two centuries later, in the *History of Britain* of the quasi-historian Nennius, and another two centuries pass before Arthur's name occurs again in the anonymous *Annals of Cambria*, which gives the circumstances and date (537) of Arthur's death for the first time. This is quite a jump from Gilda's version, and despite the exotic claims of some, the name of the general involved in the Mt. Badon battle was certainly not Arthur; the identification derives from a later date.

Arthur, as we know him, is born in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History Of The Kings Of Britain* (1136), which is the first source to connect him with the ideals of chivalry. Geoffrey, imprisoned by the Normans after their conquest of England, was almost certainly out to write a national epic, using the Anglo-Saxons as analogies for the Norman invaders, and he employed Virgil's *Aeneid* as his model and starting point. Arthur is here established firmly as a king, but he is still not our present-day version; there is no Round Table to speak of, and Arthur conquers the Roman Empire before he returns to his death in England, at Caerleon-On-Usk in Wales, the legendary site of Camelot. Merlin is also missing, and his place is taken by one Ambrosius; the wizard gains his familiar form in Geoffrey's later *Life of Merlin* (1145).

Geoffrey's chronicles touched off a number of nationalistic epics, stolen wholeheartedly from his own. Rather than prompting a revolt against the Normans, these epics became the major entertainment of the conquerors. The new masters of the land had provided the bards of Wales with a new audience, and these poets embroidered the legend gleefully. It is here that our present conception of Arthur begins, and it is here that we begin to see his true origins.

The Welsh bards were well versed in the mythology of their land, and in that mythology we find most of the knights of the Round Table: Mordred, Tristan, Balin, Balan, Percival, Melius, Gawain, among others. Merlin is there as Myrddin, a figure who plays a Zeus-like role in the Welsh pantheon. All these belong to an old pantheon. Arthur, on the other hand, is among the youngest of Welsh gods, beginning his existence as the demi-god Geraint. His situation has parallels with that of the Irish hero, Finn Mac Coul, but he suddenly takes the place of the King of the Gods, replacing Gwydion, the Mercury of



Wales and the source of all culture. No explanation of Arthur's sudden promotion is known, but it seems to predate his rise in British legend.

It is probably around the time of the Norman invasion that the god Arthur and the growing legend Arthur merge into one being. As the Normans carried the Welsh myths into Western Europe, they transformed them into the Arthurian legends we know today. The French courtly romances sprang up, circa 1160-1230, and the French added Lancelot to the cast, epitomizing their notion of the perfect knight. During the same approximate period, the religious tales of the Holy Grail (culminating in Von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, and Gottfried's *Tristan*) were added to the legend of Arthur. All that remained was to collect these sources into one long story. This was accomplished in the 13th century, with five French novels known as The Vulgate Cycle: *The History Of The Holy Grail*; *The Prose Merlin*; *The Prose Lancelot*; *The Quest Of The Holy Grail*; and the dark, ominous *Death Of Arthur*. Finally, after this long trek across the face of Europe and the human imagination, Arthur returned home to the shores of Britain, where his legend and that of the Round Table became assembled into their known form, as Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (1485).

The real Arthur, then, is of myth, not of history. If there was, indeed, a man who forms the basis of the Arthurian legend, he has left no stamp upon it. There is no Arturus, the general, whose body lies dead and buried and mouldering beneath the plains of England. There is only Arthur, the great King, who has gone to the isle of Avalon, beyond the Western Sea, to heal his wounds, and who one day shall return.

Letters



Dear Lynne, Roger, Ralph, and — especially — Howard:

I like Dominic Fortune!

This is the type of hero I've wanted to see star in his own book for about two years now! The idea of him living on a boat and paying rent is nice. It's different from the typical, old hero-in-the-mansion bit. Setting the stories in Hollywood during the late 1930s is interesting, in that the period is very much overshadowed — by the War afterwards and the Depression before.

Since the *Doc Savage* novels took place during this same period, perhaps those stories could be adapted and put into the same package with Dominic Fortune, as a new black-&-white title? Each

saw it, I decided to buy it, no matter what was between the covers. It was simply magnificent.

I usually don't like robot stories and "War Toy" was no exception. They just don't appeal to me.

I've just recently begun to learn what the old E.C. Revolution was all about... and "Good Lord!" was a story right out of the heart and soul of that time. It was a rather interesting, if not bizarre, way of looking at God and religion. It really left me with something to think about — although most of the monsters were a bit far-fetched for me. I could really go for a book of science fiction and horror tales of this type. "Good Lord!" really fits under the banner of BIZARRE ADVENTURES. Speaking of those two Als and the rest of the E.C. masterminds, it would be extremely nice to see them writing, drawing, and creating for Marvel. I'm sure many other readers would appreciate it as much as I would. And I'm certain that Marvel would be proud and happy to list those people as members of the Bullpen.

In closing, I just have three quick questions.

and interior work by Howard Chaykin, Jim Starlin, Tim Conrad, and Craig Russell... among others!

The Dominic Fortune stories originally saw print in MARVEL SUPER-ACTION #1 (first series) and MARVEL PREVIEW #2... "War Toy" was from UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION #3... and "Good Lord!" first appeared all the way back in MARVEL PREVIEW #1.

Ah, I'm glad you mentioned that asterisk, Mike. Something happened to the annotation between here and the plant! Had it not disappeared, it would have told you that those lines were taken from the Beach Boys' song "Heroes and Villains"...written by Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks, ©1967, Irving Music, Inc. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to mention that!

I'm afraid that Marvel no longer has the rights to Doc Savage, but a new series of DOMINIC FORTUNE stories is currently running in the pages of our HULK! color magazine... creatively captured on paper by Denny O'Neil and Howard Chaykin! You won't want



issue could be one-half Dom Fortune and one-half Doc Savage, in the manner of the old TALES OF SUSPENSE and other such Marvel books of the late sixties. I very much want to see more of Dom Fortune, starting with the already conceived stories. Howard Chaykin has a very appealing style, especially when he utilizes his own inking talents. Without a doubt, I want to see more of his work; most definitely the other four DOMINIC FORTUNE stories.

The issue itself (MARVEL PREVIEW #20) was excellent, considering the problems you had, putting it together at such short notice. Both of the DOMINIC FORTUNE tales were very good. The Chaykin art was superb in both stories, as was the cover. If there is any kind of award for cover art, this one deserves it. As soon as I

On page 63, there was an asterisk footnoting the short poem at the beginning of Roger Stern's essay, but no footnote was given. What was it for?

Where have these stories seen print before?

In the letters page, it was stated that Frank Frazetta would be doing the cover for EPIC ILLUSTRATED #1. I have since heard conflicting stories concerning this. Is he really painting the cover to EPIC #1?

Mike Certola
134 Westfield Drive
Holliston, MA 01746

Mr. Frazetta did indeed paint the cover for the first, landmark issue of EPIC ILLUSTRATED, Mike. If you haven't picked up your copy by now, it may already be too late! In fact, as you read these words, the second sensational issue should already be on sale... with a cover by Richard Corben

to miss it!

And speaking of those great old E.C. days of yesteryear — we were, weren't we? — you've probably heard by now that Al Williamson is collaborating with Archie Goodwin on our adaptation of the second STAR WARS motion picture, *The Empire Strikes Back!* And Wally Wood recently inked one of Frank Miller's DAREDEVIL covers. Like we've always said, Marvel is on the move!

—Roger Stern

Dear Lynne:

I've written some forceful, gutsy, poison pen letters today. You shall have none of that. You have brought me today a hero I like. His name is Dominic Fortune.

I know how you did it, people. It was that cover. The beautiful Chaykin cover caught my eye at the same moment that the neces-

sary \$1.25 was rattling around in my pocket. Naturally, as is my wont while loitering around drug stores, I looked inside. Howard Chaykin! Len Wein! Dave Cockrum! The Crusty Bunkers! Hurriedly, I scrambled to the check-out counter before the other shoppers were aware that I was escaping with the most valuable item in the store.

Dominic Fortune has that indefinable something. He's fast, he's funny, and he lives in a dream world I happen to like a lot — Hollywood in the thirties! He's impossible, and he claims brains and good looks as his only super powers.

"The Power Broker Resolution!" with its stylishly moody and hyperactive plot, was my favorite story in the issue. The art was magnificent. Chaykin, you understand, is only worthwhile when he is in total artistic control. The beauty of MONARK STAR-STALKER proved that. On MICRONAUTS, he was wasted... on DOMINIC FORTUNE, he shines! Even Wein's script was great, satisfying me in 13 pages, where 17-pages seem choppy to me.

Just a little bit of that choppi-ness was evident in "The Messiah in the Saddle Resolution!" Again, the art was superb. The character of Dominic Fortune was in even better focus, and the last few pages were brilliant.

Dominic Fortune is the kind of hero I want. I hope he can get a series someplace, drawn by Chaykin. I'd be interested in seeing him take on a case involving one of the child stars of the era, like Judy Garland or Freddy Bartholomew.

"War Toy" was very good. The ending was brilliant and unexpected, and Perez really outdid himself. Great story.

The only story that caused me



any consternation was "Good Lord!" It was a cute story, and the art was great, the characters were well developed, and the plot was original... but you aren't serious, are you? Even in jest, or for the sake of a trick ending, you don't really mean to suggest that God is some big blob of a monster, do you? Or did I take it wrong?

Anyway, let's do this again real soon! And with a new DOMINIC FORTUNE story!

Steve Gauronski
330 Friar Tuck Drive
Schererville, IN 46375

No, we don't really pretend to make any assumptions *vis-a-vis* the appearance of the deity, Steve. "Good Lord!" was just an exercise in the old "things-are-not-always-as-they-seem" stories.

And we will be doing it again real soon... producing another issue of all-new BIZARRE ADVENTURES, that is! In fact, next issue — in MARVEL PREVIEW #23 — you'll be treated to some of the most bizarre adventures you'll ever hope to find between the pages of a magazine! There'll be no FORTUNE, however, as his strip is now appearing regularly in the aforementioned HULK! magazine.

—R.S.

Dear PREVIEW:

Congratulations on a job well done. I can't remember ever enjoying a book more. Normally, I would not have noticed your book, but the cover stuck out like a shining light from across the store. You had me sold on the book even before I could waddle over to pick it up. After examining the contents page, I eagerly rubbed my hands together upon discovering that two of my favorite comic artists — George Perez and Dave Cockrum — had pieces in the book!

But wait... who is this Howard Chaykin? Isn't he the guy who did that sloppy artwork on the first few issues of STAR WARS? Hey, I know what you're thinking... and no, I didn't just stumble out of a cave. It's just that I never saw any of Chaykin's work before, aside from the STAR WARS stuff. Needless to say, the artwork on the DOMINIC FORTUNE stories completely turned me around in my view of Mr. C. Nice stuff!

I particularly enjoyed the FORTUNE stories because they managed to totally capture the feel, the essence of the thirties.

And I also tip my hat to the Crusty Bunkers. Good work, guys! Thank you all for a very enjoyable time!

Frederick J. Schiller
P.O. Box 287a
Lansing, IL 60438

Well, if nothing else, we're glad that PREVIEW #20 gave you a better look at the art of Howard Chaykin, Fred.

I've been a big fan of Howard's work for years, so it was a real pleasure for me to see the FORTUNE stories in print again... and to see them inspire a whole new series, as well! But if you think that Howard's black-&-white work is great, you ought to see his full-color art! Besides Empire (written



by Samuel Delany), and Howard's two-volume adaptation of Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*, Mr. C has a brand-new graphic-story novel out — in collaboration with Michael Moorcock — entitled *Swords of Heaven, Flowers of Hell*. It should be available at your local bookstore or fantasy emporium, so watch for it!

—R.S.

People:

Would someone kindly explain what happened? We were told that the Japanese version of Spider-Man would be appearing in issue #20 of MARVEL PREVIEW. Not only was it replaced by an issue of reprints, but it looks as though the Japanese Spider-Man will never rear his masked head in this publication.

I was looking forward to that

issue...oh, was I looking forward to it! But some sadistic being back there screwed it up!

I want to know if it was Lynn Graeme's fault. I wanna know what -----es were involved!

Kent Featherly
142 Shady Oak Trail
Charlotte, NC 28210

First, let me assure you that there are no "sadistic beings" at Marvel. No one sat behind his or her desk, chuckling as they conspired to deprive you of a look at the Japanese Spider-Man.

The main reason that we tabled the Japanese Spider-Man issue of MARVEL PREVIEW was that it just didn't work. There were a number of major technical problems — the issue was mainly to have been a *fumetti*, utilizing photo-reproductions of the Japanese adventures instead of comic art — that convinced us that the end result just would not have been very good. And contrary to what some skeptics might tell you, we don't want to print magazines that don't measure up to certain standards of quality.

Nobody screwed up. The issue just didn't work.

At any rate, you shouldn't have to worry about the reprint situation again. Lynn Graeme is devising some very interesting stuff for upcoming issues of PREVIEW.

By the way, yours has been the only negative letter to date on PREVIEW #20. In the interest of fairness, I figured we should print it. No -----es around here, eh?

—R.S.

Dear Lynn, Roger, and Company:

Issue #20 was dynamite! Dominic Fortune is everything you said. Everything that makes for good comics is here, and the enthusiasm in the work shows in every line. Obviously, Chaykin approaches his work very seriously, and as art.

The cover was a classic. Years from now, if Jim Steranko ever finishes his *History of Comics*, the cover to BIZARRE ADVENTURES will most likely be featured. The book was gung ho, hardy, and captivating. And the logo was great; it was the first thing I saw.

Mark Lampport
618 South Carroll Street
South Bend, IN 46618

Well, that's all for this go-round, people. Be with us next issue for our new BIZARRE ADVENTURES 2... and in the meantime, do drop us a line and let us know what you thought of MERLIN! Our address remains:

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★ SNEAK PREVIEW

by Lynn Graeme

Hi! This is the very first "Sneak Preview." From now on there'll be a column in every Marvel Preview issue to let you know what's going on not only in this magazine, but in the other Marvel Magazines...

First order of business: Marvel Preview #23. This is an all-new version of the successful Preview #21, BIZARRE ADVENTURES... BIZARRE ADVENTURES 2 contains the same sort of far-out characters and stories as its predecessor, but has even more stories -- six in all. To give you an idea of the extraordinary range of this book, I'd like to briefly describe the stories... "ANNIE MAE," written by DENNY O'NEIL, is a story-within-a-story that covers a time span of billions of years! The framing story is told via fumetti (photographs) taken by Marvel's ace statman, gadfly, photographer and raconteur ELIOT BROWN. GENE COLAN, justly famed for his beautiful draftsmanship and sensitive story-telling, drew the inner ten pages: a story of poignant beauty. "FINAL WARNING" is the first serious story I've written for Marvel, and is of special note for its bleak, almost savage, view of the future of New York City. FRANK MILLER is drawing for direct reproduction from the pencils... this is some of the lanky one's best art yet. "FANTASY GAMBIT," written by ROGER STERN and drawn by JIM SHERMAN, is a totally wacko story in which reality is, literally, what you

make it, while "THE WHOLE TOOTH," by STEVE SKEATES and NED SONNTAG is, uh... weird. It's sort of a fable, or maybe it's an underground goof, or maybe... Read it and explain it to me, okay? MIKE BARR and GENE COLAN work together on "THE WAY TO HEAVEN." This is a "the man who learned better" story about innocence, betrayal, and the mysterious workings of the Tao. Finally, I have the honor to work with JOHN BUSCEMA on a story called "SHANDRA!" By the way, the cover for BIZARRE ADVENTURES 2 was painted by Clyde Caldwell, a well-known science fiction artist.

FUTURE SNEAK...

Ralph and I think Marvel Preview #24 is going to be another winner. As yet untitled, it's theme is the myth of feminine evil (quipped WALT SIMONSON, "What myth?!"). The cover will be painted by PAUL GULACY, who will also be the artist on a Black Widow story written by RALPH MACCHIO. DENNY O'NEIL will write a 22 page Daughters of the Dragon story, with MAR-SCHALL ROGERS doing the art, and ROGER MCKENZIE will chill us with a 15 pager with art, hopefully, by WALT SIMONSON. (MAR-SCHALL, by the way, is drawing a Howard the Duck story for issue #8 called "DUCKMAN" and WALT is painting the cover for The Hulk #23.)

That's all the news we have room for this time: next issue there'll be more news -- and don't hesitate to drop us a line about things you want to know.

